

*December 2016*

Dave – I realize this time of year can be hectic. This letter is intended for you to read – or perhaps later re-read – at your leisure.

I don't often send out a Family Letter at the end of the year, but I'm confident you will agree: this year has been unique. I plan to write several of these reflective letters, but this first one is to you.

I've included a calendar for 2017 – we are wrapping up a most “interesting” year, and I thought a calendar is a good metaphor for looking back, and looking forward. This calendar also commemorates the Douglas Faust Blackledge Memorial – a concept that our good friends, Tom and Sheila Genoni, helped make a reality. And no, I am not asking anyone to contribute to the cause – the Genonis got us started, it is well funded, and my son David and I will carry it forward from here. A metaphor.

For both of us, the loss of a beloved member of our inner circle is certainly cause for reflection. I know you went through several years of caring for Nan, and Bonnie and I went through quite a bit supporting my son Douglas. The good fight.

Dave, I'm pretty sure I'll never really figure out this thing called "Life" but I can certainly recognize Life Changes, some immediately, some only after reflection.

I again want to say, from my view, you did a wonderful job with/for Nan - I'm sure much better than I did with Helen. Doug was a different situation. I can tell you I have had numerous folks come up to me, and say, some quite profoundly, "A parent should never outlive their child." I've thought about/reflected on that quite a bit, and I now realize that for most of those tombstones in war-related cemeteries, there were parents that outlived their children. For many of the fatal accidents on the road, and for most of the fatal overdoses we hear about, there are grieving parents. So the situation is not uncommon. Many parents outlive one or more of their children.

Given that reality, here are some thoughts: Parents stay parents throughout their lives, and this includes worrying about your kids, well after they have flown the nest and gone out on their own, established their own Life. Perhaps many parents think: will my kids be OK after I'm gone? Will they have sufficient employment/funds/health to enjoy the type of Life I envisioned for them? Thus, when someone dies prior to us, we may experience grief, but we 'have' to experience closure. In the case of a child, we have seen the entire arc of their Life. We may certainly have wanted them to have an extended Life, but hey, we want an extended Life for

ourselves. Would it have been better for me (or Doug) if I died before Doug? I don't see how.

So, as we in Genealogy certainly have seen, Life goes on. The World continues to turn, the Sun continues to rise (and set).

I will say this: I am so grateful that Bonnie came into my Life. She told me early on, seeing me sitting for hours in front of my computer screen (often working on our Magnum Opus): "Look, I've been on a cruise where I see these old guys barely getting around, with walkers, with wheelchairs - while we can still move around, let's get out and do things! When your legs no longer work, you can still sit in front of your computer screen!"

More than getting me out, Bonnie has introduced me into her Family, and they have embraced me as their own. A large, diverse family, sometimes disruptive, usually clever and funny, always interesting. I always thought my Blackledge family was unusually large and inclusive - then I met Bonnie's. Case in point is this Year of Reflection: a Hirsch Cousins Reunion in Albion, Nebraska, and a 60th Wedding Anniversary celebration in San Pedro, California. Many stories told, many interactions exchanged, many memories massaged. I felt like I really participated in both, was an integral part of both. Bonnie would probably say, "yes, a bit too much" - but hey, that's what we Blackledges do!

In the next year or so, as a continuation of this reflective look back, and the optimistic look forward, I will be working on a book, under the working title: *"Blackledge Stories - memoirs, anecdotes, and images from the descendants of Lewis (H.) Blackledge of Red Cloud, Nebraska."* My brother Pete has suggested I can refer to it as BS.

Meanwhile, to paraphrase what my Uncle Hobert said in his published statement of semi-retirement, "Right now I ain't mad at anybody very much." I continue to enjoy these thoughts and reflections, as well as what transpires throughout the year: in Sports, in Politics, in Economics, in Family. Dave, I'm proud of you and what you have accomplished, and as I have said many times, I am so pleased with the excellent result of our teamwork that produced *"Blackledges in America"* - both editions! A true Legacy and a special Heritage.

Thank you! With great affection and appreciation,

- Mike